

MEDITERRANEAN TOURISM FACING HEAT WAVES AND FIRES

The Copernicus Climate Change Service reported that July 2023 was the hottest month recorded on Earth. Therefore, many travel agencies suggest avoiding popular tourist destinations in July where high temperatures make excursions in full sunlight risky. This has been a long-standing issue in Egypt, with Cairo, Alexandria, and Luxor being the main areas affected during the summer low season. Tunisia also faces similar challenges.

Unfortunately, the extreme temperature conditions commonly found in summer on the African continent are now moving to the other side of the Mediterranean. The European Commission has identified Greece, Italy, Croatia, Spain, and France as the countries most exposed to the consequences of climate change in tourism, which could ultimately impact their economies.

Too Hot to Explore

It's 9 pm on Santorini Island, located in the Aegean Sea, and the restaurants are packed with tourists. Suddenly, hundreds of mobile phones simultaneously emit a beep. It's an alert in the form of a text message from the authorities, warning inhabitants and visitors about temperatures reaching up to 46°C.

Adding to the intense heat, there are summer fires in Corfu and Rhodes that have evacuated over 2,000 tourists. The Acropolis has had to close in Athens due to a heat wave. Similar situations happen in Rome and Naples. The thermometer in southern Europe is rising, and tourists are struggling to find places to cool off. As a result, one in ten tourists who experience a heat wave during their vacations in southern Europe view destinations like Spain or Italy negatively.

Mediterranean Tourism Numbers Decreasing?

In Spain, coastal areas or islands hardly notice the intense heat. But in the interior, it is already causing a reduction in the number of travelers. In Madrid, for example, in July and August 2022, visitors decreased mainly due to the intense weather in the capital. Something similar happened in Seville.

The issue is now a reality. Moody's has issued a warning in a report about the impact of heat waves that are becoming more frequent and severely impact the Mediterranean tourism industry. The report highlights that this could decrease southern Europe's appeal as a tourist destination in the long run. It could result in a reduction in demand during the summer season, which would have negative economic consequences given the sector's significance. The Spanish economy, in particular, would be most severely impacted if this trend continued, according to the agency's cautionary message.

Heat Waves Endanger the Economies

According to the European Commission, if global average temperatures increase by 1.5°C, Spain's debt ratios could rise by 4.5 percentage points, Greece's by 2.6 percentage points, and Italy's by 2.2 percentage points by 2032. This is due to extreme weather events' economic and fiscal costs, which may lead to cost overruns and affect tourism in warm destinations. Sailors in the southern part of the continent should note this.

The tourism industry in southern Europe, particularly in Spain, is at a standstill. According to Spanish entrepreneurs, there are no noticeable changes in tourist trends. During the summer, foreign visitors flock to warm destinations like Madrid, Seville, and Granada. Meanwhile, local tourists tend to avoid inland cities during July and August.

However, tourists are becoming increasingly worried about extreme weather conditions. A survey by the European Travel Commission in early July revealed that 8% of EU tourists are concerned about potential extreme weather during their vacations. Although this may not seem like a high percentage, 12% of respondents are worried about the war in Ukraine.

Higher Temperatures, Longer Season

Queuing in line for 45 minutes to access an attraction or visit a monument poses an undue risk that can be eliminated with effective ticket management. A significant concern in the tourism industry is whether visitors will begin to avoid countries experiencing drought and extreme heat. According to entrepreneurs, this is already happening. However, the private sector also notes a positive aspect: rising temperatures are extending the high season, which spans a more significant number of weeks between spring and autumn, despite the alarming situation.

Europe is bracing for severe weather that will significantly impact the economy. The Mediterranean tourism industry is also facing this change and is at a critical point where it must adapt to the new reality.

Date: 2023-09-04

Article link:

<https://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-mediterranean-tourism-endangered-by-rising-temperatures-article2818>